

equity 101

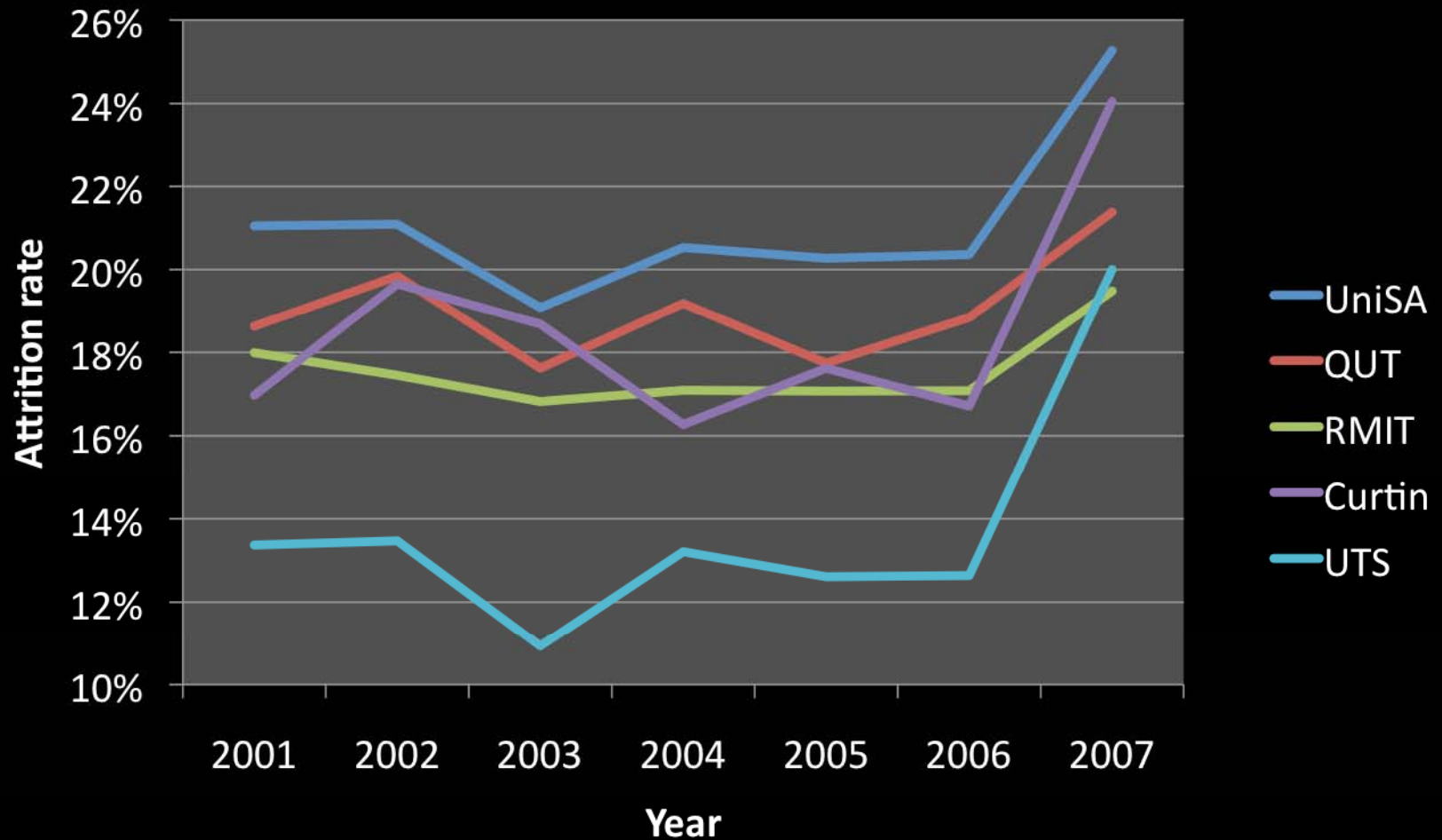
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# Three Propositions for Retaining Students to Completion

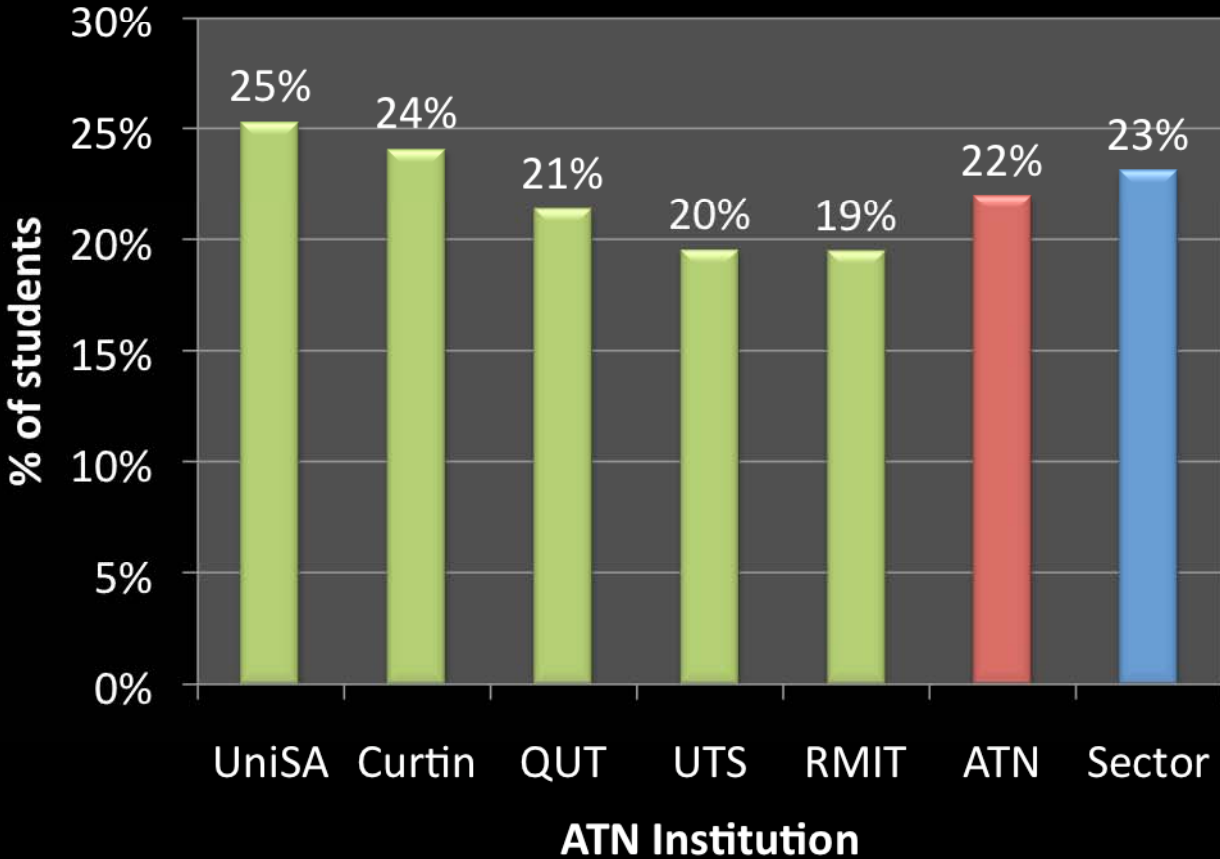
Trevor Gale, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

## Attrition rate for commencing domestic bachelor students, ATN universities, 2001-2007



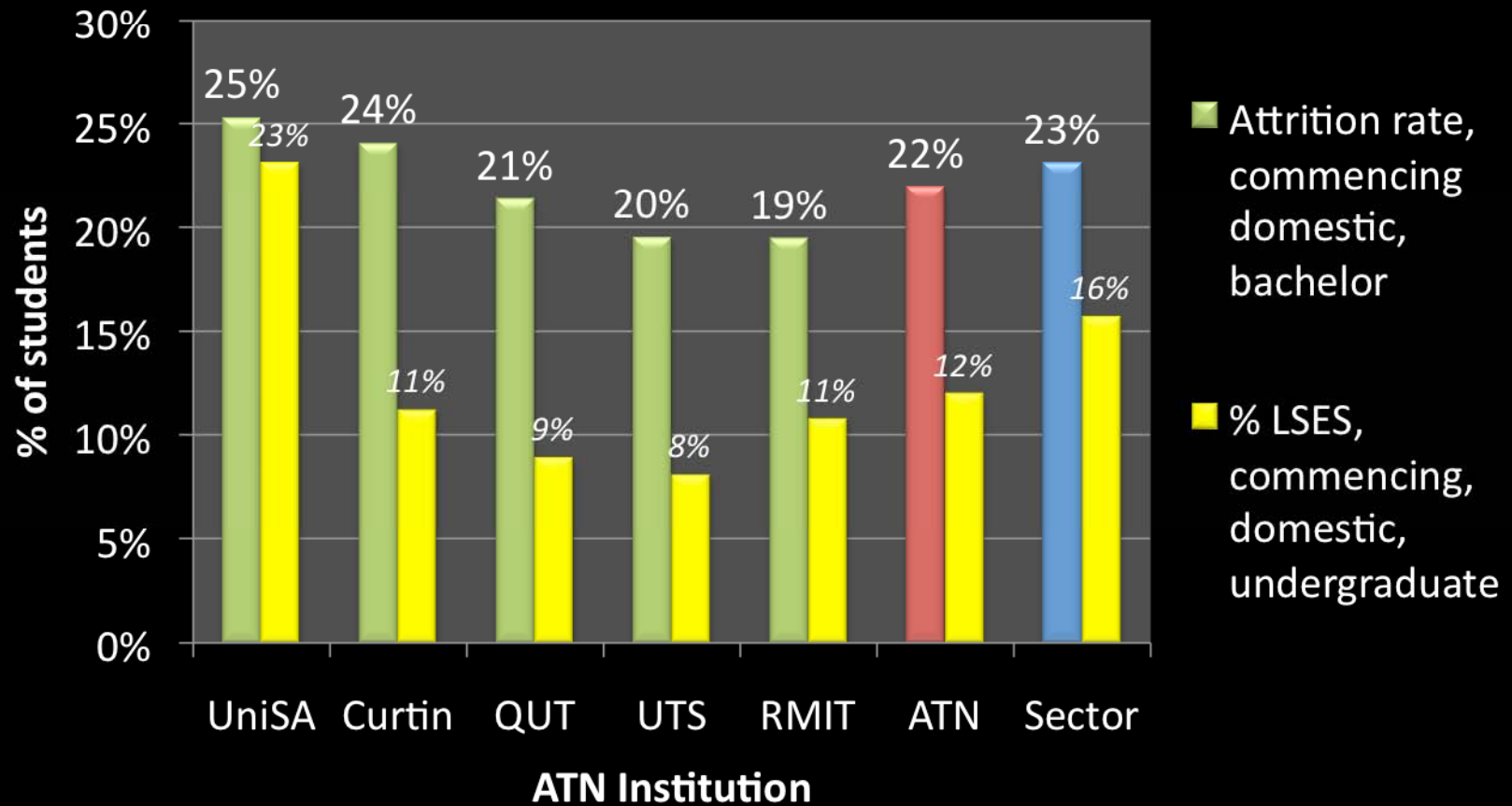
Source: DEEWR/DEST, Selected Higher Education Statistics, 2001-2007

### Attrition rates, ATN universities, 2007



Source: DEEWR Selected Higher Education Statistics, 2007 and unpublished data

## Attrition and low SES participation rates, ATN universities, 2007



Source: DEEWR Selected Higher Education Statistics, 2007 and unpublished data

# Low SES student retention ratios ATN Institutions, 2006

- UniSA: 1.01
- Curtin: 0.97
- QUT: 1.00
- UTS: 1.01
- RMIT: 1.02
  
- ATN: 1.002

Retention ratio =

$$\frac{\text{\% of low SES students retained}}{\text{\% of all students retained}}$$

1.00 = retention rate is the same for  
low SES students and for all students

>1.00 = low SES retention rate is  
lower than for all students

<1.00 = low SES retention rate is  
higher than for all students

## Proposition 1:

To increase retention for disadvantaged groups:

*increase student support*

“... students from disadvantaged backgrounds ... [often] require *higher levels of support* to succeed, including financial assistance and greater academic support, mentoring and counselling services.”

*Transforming Australia's Higher Education System 2009: 14*

“first year retention ... should respond quite readily to institutions' efforts to *provide additional support* and improve the transition and experience of first year students.”

*An Indicator Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding 2009: 13*

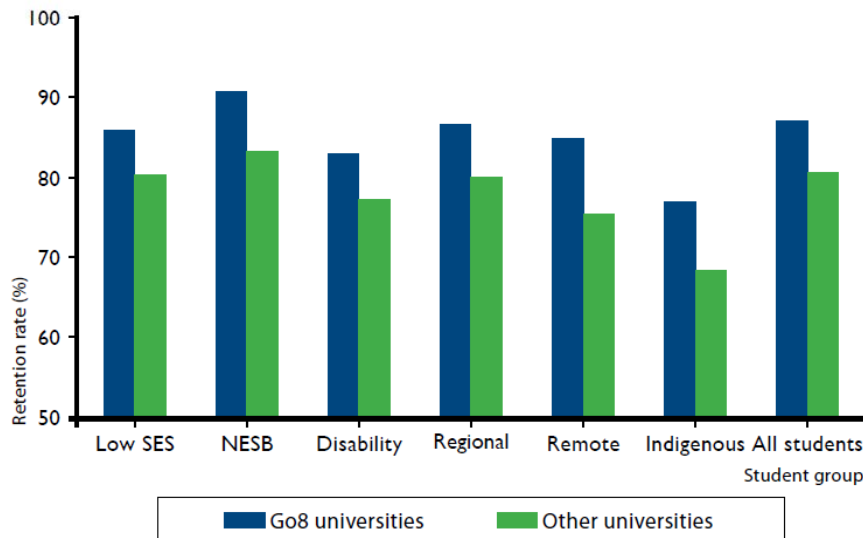
# What is the relationship between student retention and ... ?

- The amount of support
- The length of the support
- The type of support
- The \$ spent on support
- The number of students supported
- The type of students supported
- The type of institution

*More \$, activities, staff, infrastructure  
... more of the same?*

- Remedial classes (literacy, essay writing, etc);
- counselling services, health services; child minding services;
- employment and housing services;
- scholarships;
- transport (e.g. between campuses);
- library and other knowledge resources; etc.

Figure 17. Retention rate of Bachelor students, 2002-06



Source: DEEWR, 2002-07

“Students in all equity groups have *better outcomes* in terms of attrition, retention and success at Go8 universities than at other universities. Outcomes for Remote and Indigenous students are *markedly better* at Go8 universities.”

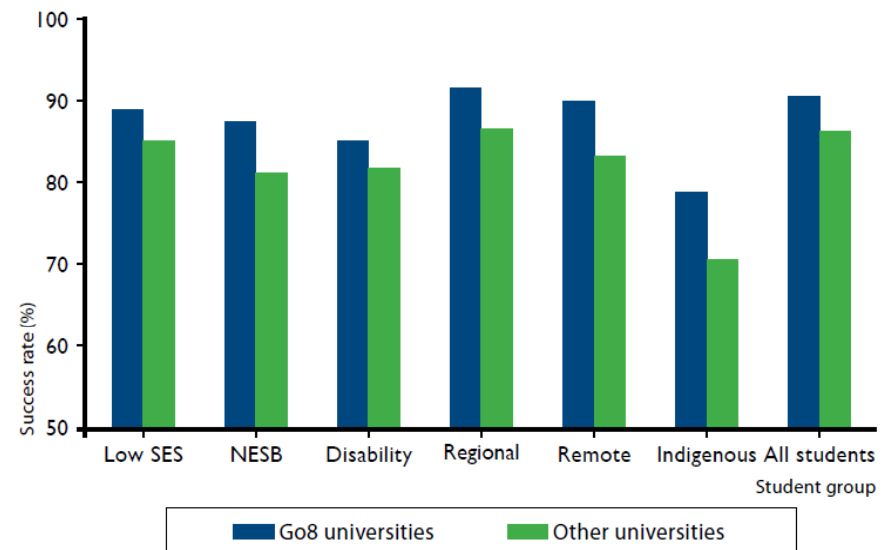
Source: Go8 2009: 6, 8

<http://www.go8.edu.au/storage/go8statements/2009/go8-backgrounder9-access&success.pdf>

Do Go8s provide more support for disadvantaged groups?

Does having fewer students to support lead to higher retention?

Figure 18. Success rate of Bachelor students, 2002-07



Source: DEEWR, 2002-07

# Impact of QUT scholarship scheme on first-year attrition rates

## A model scholarship scheme

- \$3m scholarship scheme
- ALTC Program award
- One of the largest and most effective schemes of its kind in the sector

## Impact on QUT attrition rates

- Improvement to attrition rate at all-of-University level is about 0.5%,
- *Improvement to attrition at first-year level is about 1.5% at best*
- *Repeating the \$3m scheme each year maintains these levels, rather than improving them*

Source: QUT 2010 submission to DEEWR 2009 discussion paper: "An Indicator Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding"

## Proposition 2:

To increase retention for disadvantaged groups:  
*create engaging learning environments*

“For the performance funding targets to be agreed in 2010 for 2011, it is proposed that *engagement* would be represented by the proxy indicator of first year *retention* rates.”

*An Indicator Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding 2009: 12*

- Weak institutions “expect students to *engage themselves*” (Harper & Quaye 2009: 6).
- “curricula cannot be realized as technical projects in which things are *done to students* ... Successful curricula have to *win over their students*” (Barnett & Coate 2005: 137).
- Responsible institutions “create environments that *make learning possible*” (Krause & Coates 2008: 494).

# Creating learning environments that retain disadvantaged students

- Create collaborative and inclusive spaces: in which students are *encouraged to share their beliefs, knowledge and experiences*.
- Develop student-centred strategies: entails *flexible and tailored activities* that 'enable students to ground their learning in something relevant to them as individuals'.
- Connect with students' lives: subject matter is perceived as *relevant to students' immediate lives* or their *imagined roles and identities* as professionals.
- Be culturally aware: includes using *culturally relevant examples*, anecdotes and stories to aid learning, as well as using a *non-academic frame of reference* for teaching (i.e. teaching beyond the academic culture).

## Proposition 3:

To increase retention for disadvantaged groups:  
*has academic benefits for all*

The benefits for *all* university students in more diverse cohorts include:

- “greater relative gains in *critical* and *active thinking* ...
- greater intellectual *engagement* and academic *motivation* ...
- greater relative gains in intellectual and social *self-concept* ... [and]
- *higher levels of retention* and increases in degree *aspirations*” (Milem 2003: 142).
- The educational benefits are *greatest for “majority students* who have previously lacked significant direct exposure to minorities” (Milem 2003: 131-132).
- *In the absence of student diversity*, “the quality and texture of the education we [universities] provide will *be significantly diminished*” (Association of American Universities 1997).